

Alicia Czarnecki

Graduation Year: Junior

College: Engineering

Major(s): Environmental Engineering

Minors(s): --

Scholar Group Membership: No

Did you received other funding for this project?: ND SWE - additional costs past \$500 granted by CUSE

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? I would not have been able to attend this conference without the generosity of CUSE funding, as flights and lodging in Washington, D.C. are more expensive than a student budget allows. I was concerned that I would have to discontinue my attendance, but receiving the funding to cover most of the cost of the trip from CUSE allowed me to still participate in this great opportunity.

Project Title: Society of Women Engineers 2016 Capitol Hill Day

Project Location: Washington, D.C.

ND Faculty Mentor: Jeremy Castle

Project Type: Conference - Attendance

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Career discernment and/or preparation

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Very Much

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Very Much

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Very Much

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

The first day of the conference consisted of presentations from SWE administration and congressional staffers about the current state of policy regarding diversity in the STEM workplace and funding of STEM education. They gave us information to talk with the staffers at our visits on the second day and taught us how to effectively advocate for our cause in a way that will impact how legislators think. At the end of the first day, there was a networking event where I was able to meet and talk with some congresspeople, staffers, and other professional engineers who were in attendance at the conference. The second day consisted of three visits to congressional offices, where I went with a group of other women at the conference from my region to talk with congresspeople from the Midwest about STEM policy. We also had the opportunity to have a tour of the Capitol from a member from the office of the Architect of the Capitol, as well as attend a talk by the Engineer of the Capitol.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

I learned so much about how to be an advocate for policy that is important to my future field of work, and also how information is presented to congressional staffers in order to make an actual impact on legislatures' opinions and actions. I was able to talk with both professional engineers and congressional staffers about issues surrounding STEM professions and diversity in the STEM workplace, and our advocacy was very well received and informed the staffers about some issues that they were formerly unaware of. I also learned about how to advocate using my own experiences and opinions coming from the perspective of a female engineering student.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

I am interested in pursuing a career in STEM policy, so this was a great experience to not only learn about the current state of legislation regarding this topic but also talk with congressional staff about what information and help they need from the lawmaking side in order to promote diversity and funding. This also was a unique opportunity for me to network with professional women engineers, as I was one of 3-4 student members in attendance. We were put into groups by region, so I was able to meet and talk with several prominent women engineers from the Midwest and learn about their career paths and keys to success.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

The biggest thing is to always be looking for opportunities and to take advantage of everything that comes your way. I found out about this experience from a generic email from the Society of Women Engineers newsletter, and I was the only person from ND who went. It was something I had to act on fast because the announcement was last minute, so I had to quickly apply and secure funding. It was a lot of work and I was nervous to be the only ND person there, and one of only a few student members of SWE in attendance, but it was worth it for the experiences and networking that I gained from this trip.